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Intercultural business communication: a template for designing a training curriculum

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Intercultural business communication: A template for designing a training curriculum

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Major Professor: Jill M Wagner

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2001

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Graduate College
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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Stephanie Joanne Siska

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

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ABSTRACT

Despite the abundance of sources now available for intercultural trainers to build and evaluate their programs, information about how to determine the content of the training curriculum is lacking. As research in intercultural (and cross-cultural) communication has increased over the decades, numerous training topics have been identified within the field of intercultural communication. Trainers with a limited amount of time to spend with their trainees must decide what content areas to train and how to train them based on the characteristics of the organization and the trainees. The purpose of this study was to employ the advice of experienced intercultural trainers who recommend first conducting a needs assessment of the trainees and then developing a curriculum based on those needs. This study also pays special attention to the unique characteristics of adult learners. The participants of this study were American and international employees of an Internet software development company. Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used. Thirty-six participants answered a survey and eight participants were interviewed. The results and discussion focus on the differences between the Native English speaker (NS) and Non-native English speaker (NNS) responses. As predicted, the needs assessment revealed specific issues in verbal and nonverbal communication style, time orientation and performance recognition. Interestingly, other issues peripheral to the usual focus of intercultural communication were also identified including teamwork and project planning. The foundational theory of the recommended training is based on Hofstede's (1980) four cultural dimensions: *Masculinity v. Femininity*, *Power Distance*, *Uncertainty Avoidance*, and *Individualism v. Collectivism* – with specific focus on the latter dimension. This thesis

includes the results of the needs assessment, the training proposal, an outline of the curriculum, and a discussion of the limitations and recommendations for further research.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“At the heart of the concept of culture is the notion that people from different cultures develop distinctive interaction styles and preferred communication strategies” (Kim 1993, p. 132). Few people today would argue this significant connection between culture and communication, and the general acceptance of it has prompted research aimed at improving intercultural interactions; more specifically, intercultural communication. In the last three decades, many content areas within the subject of intercultural communication have been identified, and as a result, training and development in intercultural communication for students, professors, academic departments, human resource directors, office staff, and managers has now become commonplace. In addition, *intercultural business communication*, defined as “communication within and between businesses that involves people from more than one culture” (Chaney, 2000, p. 2) has emerged as an increasingly important branch of intercultural communication research. Furthermore, *interpersonal communication* competency has been reported as the most important competency in culturally diverse work forces (Mohaptra et al., 1993, p.11).

In response to this recognized need to offer training in intercultural communication issues, trainers have considered and practiced three main learning emphases: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Chaney (2000) has categorized the various intercultural training (ICT) approaches commonly used as follows: the intellectual or classroom model (cognitive), the area training or simulation model (affective), the self-awareness model including sensitivity training (affective), the cultural awareness model (affective), the interaction approach, and lastly, the multidimensional approach, which attempts to combine cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of training (pp. 69-70). Despite the abundance of

information about how cultures differ, the theories behind those differences, and approaches to addressing those differences and improving intercultural understanding, little work has been done to show how an intercultural communication trainer should go about tailoring a curriculum for a specific multicultural audience.

As the review of literature will show, there are currently many resources for intercultural trainers. Despite being a relatively young academic subject, the study of intercultural communication has received considerable attention by social scientists to date. As a result, the number of potential content areas, approaches, and exercises that can be used have reached a level that makes tailoring a curriculum for a specific audience a daunting task for any trainer. Not only are intercultural communication trainers in need of a template for determining a training curriculum, but they also need to keep in mind the characteristics of their audience, an aspect of intercultural communication training which has received little attention. In the case of intercultural business communication training specifically, the unique learning strategies, goals, and concerns of adult learners should be equally as important as the content of the training. This thesis will show how the combined use of a needs assessment, the consideration of the unique characteristics of adult learners, and the awareness of intercultural training considerations results in a tailored intercultural business communication training curriculum.

Research Question

The premise of this thesis is that the development of intercultural communication training programs for specific multicultural work environments be seen as a fundamental aspect of research in intercultural communication. There is no doubt that societies around

the world, especially in the United States, are faced with the challenge of communicating across and among cultures due to the increasing globalization of business and the increased mobility of international students, professionals and spouses. My experience assisting in the delivery of short workshops and seminars on intercultural communication in the university environment has exposed me to many topics within intercultural communication, as well as the various approaches and exercises that can be used to deliver the training. In this setting, given that the trainees are students in a learning environment and are a captive audience, the topic to be presented is usually decided by the professor of the students based on his/her perception of what the students need to learn. This may be appropriate for the university/classroom setting. In a business setting that consists of more mature adult learners, a needs assessment is crucial in determining what topics to train. However, the review of literature has confirmed that the actual trainees are seldom involved in the decision of what topics to train. Therefore, the problem of this study is to determine the perceived intercultural communication training needs of the participants who work together in a dense multicultural environment by administering a needs assessment and developing a training curriculum using those needs as the foundation for the training content. Rather than focus on a specific training model, this thesis focuses on the process of administering the Needs Assessment and choosing the content of the training while respecting the characteristics of a multicultural work environment and a varied group of adult learners.

As a result of the data analysis, I will present a recommendation for a training curriculum based on the opinions and perceptions of the employees surveyed and interviewed, as well as the advice offered by experienced intercultural communication

trainers. In addition, a discussion of the methodological issues will highlight important implications and areas of further study.

Thesis Organization

This thesis begins with a brief Literature Review in which I introduce and define relevant terms as well as distinguish between different aspects of intercultural communication. This chapter also serves as an introduction to the various aspects of intercultural training that need to be considered.

As I will explain further in the Methodology chapter, I used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques in order to collect the most accurate data possible. For this reason, the results of the quantitative survey instrument and the interviews are reported separately, with brief discussions highlighting the major findings following each Results chapter.

Following the final Results and Discussion section, the Conclusions chapter not only includes the training proposal and recommended curriculum, but also focuses on special intercultural training considerations and how the data from the Needs Assessment provided the information I needed to recognize the specific, and sometimes surprising, training needs of the participants.

The General Conclusions chapter includes a brief discussion of the highlights of the entire research process as well as a Limitations and Recommendations section, which I hope will offer other hopeful intercultural communication trainers the incentive to continue research in the area of intercultural communication curriculum development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the area of intercultural communication might be considered in its youth, having established itself as a significant academic area in its own right in the nineteen-seventies with the emergence of a “plethora of theories, research methodologies, and training and education models” (Milhouse, 1996, p. 69), much research has been done to establish foundational theories of the relationship between culture and communication in Anthropology and Communication Studies (Hall, 1959, 1966, 1990; Gudykunst, 1983; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1989; Kim, 1988; Brislin, 1993; Wiseman, 1995). In addition, applied research in *cross-cultural* communication training theories has emerged (Albert, 1986; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Martin, 1986; McCaffery, 1986) as well as cross-cultural adaptation theories and models (Brislin, 1981; Kim, 1988; Ellingsworth, 1988). We have also seen theories of *intercultural communication competence* develop to focus on the individual’s ability to manipulate his or her environment, attain personal goals, and select and perform appropriate and effective communication behaviors (Koester, Wiseman & Sanders, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 1996). Kim (1988) reports that Gudykunst, in 1983, published the first anthology of works that attempted to theorize intercultural communication, “pushing the field forward in the direction of greater coherence and rigor” (p. 11). Each area mentioned lends itself to an understanding of the issues surrounding communication and culture. As a result, we often see overlap in the use of the terms *intercultural* and *cross-cultural* within the field of communication (Koester, Wiseman & Sanders, 1993). It is important, especially for the purposes of this study, to make the distinction between the terms *cross-cultural* and *intercultural*. *Cross-cultural* research generally involves the comparative study of two or more cultures, hence the term *cross-*

cultural training to apply to workshops that prepare an American to work in Japan for example, or vice versa. The focus is usually on the differences between two cultures.

Intercultural research, on the other hand, involves the study of people from different cultures who are interacting together (Asante & Gudykunst, 1989). Kim's (1988) definition offers a similar perspective: "The term *intercultural communication* is conceived in the present theories primarily as direct, face-to-face communication encounters between or among individuals with differing cultural backgrounds" (p. 12). Clearly, now in the twenty-first century, we also must include written and electronic communication as part of the definition. Additionally, we should keep in mind that the field of intercultural communication includes nonverbal communication as an equal partner in the communication process (e.g. Samovar & Porter, 1991; Martin & Nakayama, 1997). The present study includes *nonverbal* communication as an aspect of intercultural communication in all contexts.

Since the field of intercultural communication and the necessity for training have received more attention, much of the work in improving communication across and between cultures has focused on the training needs of Americans going overseas, or "expatriate" managers or professionals, and the effectiveness of that training (Albert, 1986; McCaffey, 1986; Hall & Gudykunst, 1989; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Dean & Popp, 1990; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Williams & Bent, 1996; Shachar & Amir, 1996). This focus most accurately fits in the category of "cross-cultural communication" training, as defined earlier. Recently, researchers have also recognized the importance of "inpatiation" training for internationals with assignments in the organization's home market (Harvey, 1997). However, societies, universities and corporations are not faced only with the challenge of communicating with one culture at a time. Our social and work environments are becoming

more *multicultural*, and research to date has paid little attention to the needs of individuals operating in multicultural environments. “Cultural diversity, or multiculturalism, will become the norm rather than the exception in American life” (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Intercultural training for those working in a multicultural environment is particularly important given what we know to be true of culture, that, “in addition to providing the rules, schemas, scripts, and values used in communication, cultures most basically define the logic of communication itself” (Applegate & Sypher, 1988, p. 49). However, as Triandis (1991) notes, simply having some intercultural experience does not guarantee an understanding of the perspectives of members from another culture. For this reason, individuals who have experience working with others from varying cultures can still benefit from intercultural communication training. For example, Martin and Chaney (1992) make the following important point about language differences and use, which is often the central concern in intercultural interactions:

When English is a second language, the second language individuals concentrate on the verbiage of the language rather than concentrating on ideas, concepts and contents that would dominate their concentration if they were using their own native language. Beyond this is the problem U.S. citizens have of feeling superior and feeling no responsibility to share the burden of language in communication. English [is] has become a low context language, which means it is very difficult for non-native speakers to understand the language due to such things as homonyms and slang. (p. 275)

This is just one aspect of intercultural interactions that presents a challenge to both native and non-native speakers. On a larger scale, Albert (1994) has suggested a list of characteristics of cultural-minority members which highlights their unique experiences when working in the majority culture: (a) encountering behaviors and being treated in a way that often goes counter to the norms of one’s own culture, (b) having no place to bring up matters related to

how one is treated and how this affects one's ability to do the job, (c) having feelings of vulnerability, (d) being perceived as a threat to the system, (d) being perceived as different from and often as inferior to mainstream persons, and in some instances, (e) being perceived as 'no different' from everybody which imposes the burden to fit in (pp. 159-162) .

Certainly such experiences present a potential threat to individual and team job performance as well as to the overall work environment. Although training in the foundational concepts and theories of intercultural communication might improve the experiences or perceptions of cultural-minority members (and cultural-majority members), it is not likely to address the specific experiences of individuals in a unique multicultural work environment. Additionally, we not only need to be aware of the unique characteristics and experiences of cultural minority members in the workplace, but we also must consider the unique categories and characteristics of *adult learners*, an aspect of intercultural communication training that research to date has largely neglected. Lenz (1982) cites Cyril Houle's (1961) pioneering work in the analysis of adult learning motivation which resulted in three categories of adult learners:

1. Goal oriented learner. Learning takes place in response to a perceived need or interest.
2. Activity oriented learner. Learning is fostered in a social context, through relationships with other learners.
3. Learning oriented learner. Such a learner seeks knowledge for its own sake and is highly receptive to conceptual approaches.

Intercultural communication training can also benefit from understanding the characteristics of adult learners, as Knowles (1990) describes: Adult learners:

1. See themselves as capable of self-direction, and desires others to see them that way.
2. Bring a lifetime of experience to the learning situation and define themselves based on their experiences.
3. Need developmental tasks that focus on social and occupational role competence.
4. Need instruction that is problem-centered rather than theory centered.
5. Need the opportunity to apply and try out learning quickly.

Lenz (1982) offers a more personal profile of adult learners that provides a valuable insight into their potential attitudes towards training. She describes adult learners as:

...people whose lives are overflowing with commitments, obligations, burdens of one sort or another. They have jobs or professions that occupy a substantial amount of their time, or domestic responsibilities, or, in many cases, both. The time and energy they invest in learning must compete with all the personal, social, family, community, and other tasks, responsibilities, and diversions that press upon the lives of most adults. (p. 2)

Arnold and McClure (1996) have narrowed these characteristics down to four principles that need to be considered by the trainer, regardless of the training environment: “Adult learners are pragmatic individuals, preoccupied with many demands of their time, motivated by self-interest, and attentive to those things they can learn by doing” (p. 43). These descriptions of adult learners fit the participants in this study. For that reason, keeping these characteristics in mind is crucial, given that the trainees come from various walks of life, possess differing world views and work ethics, utilize time differently, and are likely to question the necessity of intercultural communication training in the first place, given their experience working in a multicultural environment. Consequently, the trainer must consider these characteristics when developing a training plan that will include exercises that are appropriate for the

context of adult learning, as well as effective and successful in addressing the perceived needs of the trainees. Some strategies the trainer should consider to ensure the curriculum is appropriate for adult learners are recommended by Lenz (1982) as follows:

1. Avoid long lectures. Break material up into mini-lectures of ten to fifteen minutes.
2. Plan for lively, meaningful tasks and activities.
3. Provide for a variety of methods and materials.
4. Introduce new information by establishing connections with prior learning.
5. Allow at least one ten-minute break for each hour of class.
6. Arrange for good lighting, acoustics, room temperature, etc.
7. Involve students in identifying objectives and procedures.

Lenz recommends these strategies based on what she calls the *learning conditions* of adults: short concentration span, fatigue, resistance to new information, and low level of initiative and participation (p. 25).

The next logical step after considering the characteristics of the trainees is to consider the desired qualities of the trainer and the training program. Ptak, Cooper & Brislin (1995) have made a valuable contribution to the field of cross-cultural training by collecting advice and insights from experienced trainers in the field. Although the focus of this research is on *intercultural* communication training, I suggest that the most desirable trainer characteristics are much the same. Ptak et al. (1995) list the following as important trainer characteristics:

1. Supportive of participants – respect, maturity and discretion.
2. Supportive of themselves – balance own needs with needs of participants.

3. Humility – mature enough not to need the “limelight” and willing to admit when they are wrong.
4. Humor – can laugh at themselves without being disrespectful.
5. Being multicultural – ability to resolve conflict, communicate, and negotiate across cultures.
6. Flexible – able to address different learning styles of participants and willing to learn from them.
7. Presentation – extensive knowledge of materials and methods combined with the ability to make it look easy.

Additionally, “as the adult is his/[her] experience, failure to utilize the experience of the adult learner is equivalent to rejecting him/[her] as a person” (Knowles, 1990, p. 194). Therefore, the successful trainer will draw from the experiences of the trainees and involve them in the training process, by using their experiences as examples and asking for their input in problem-solving.

Determining the content of an intercultural communication training program is the next area that needs to be examined, and the primary focus of this thesis. Martin & Chaney (1992) found twenty-two content areas to be “essential” for an intercultural business communication course. Their results were determined via the survey of three groups of individuals considered experts in intercultural communication, one group of whom were international business persons who had traveled internationally and were employed by a multinational corporation. Some of the highest ranking content areas were as follows: *definitions of intercultural terms, work attitudes, ethics, negotiation guidelines, culture-specific introductions and greetings, customs, protocol, position and status and global*

interdependence (p. 270). Their findings provide an excellent framework and starting point for novice trainers of intercultural business communication; however, their results do not reflect the perceived need of the actual trainees, which is argued here to be perhaps the most crucial step in the development of an effective training program given what we know about adult learners. As discussed earlier, goal-oriented adult learners learn in response to a perceived need or interest and also expect what they are learning to be immediately useful; therefore, the training content must reflect the perceived need of the trainees in order for it to be well-received and effective. Knowles (1990) asserts that formal curriculum development is less valuable than finding out what the learners need to learn. Similarly, Ptak et al. (1995) found that “participants recommend that a thorough needs assessment helps define a trainee’s expectations from a cross-cultural program and helps identify their level of understanding” (p. 430). Certainly many topics within intercultural communication have been identified and exercises and activities have been created to address those topics, as Martin and Chaney’s (1992) content areas mentioned above show.

Although each of these areas mentioned is important, this should not prompt intercultural trainers to necessarily train each of these content areas in any given training situation. Due to the potential variety of experiences of adult learners, trainers should not assume that a particular multicultural work environment requires training in each topic. For this reason, Gudykunst, et al. (1996) recommend that trainers conduct needs assessments of the trainees; however, keeping in mind the following important note: “We are not suggesting that training be based on the needs assessment. Rather, training should be theoretically based, but a needs assessment is necessary to understanding trainees’ perceptions of their needs. If these needs are not addressed in some way, trainees may reject the other material presented”

(note 4, p. 78). This thesis will show how unique the perceived training needs of a multicultural environment can be. To this end, I have followed the advice of Levy (1999), who recommends the use of Nadler's (1982) Critical-Events Model (see Figure 1) for intercultural communication training design because it "works best for learning programs related to the job the individual now has, rather than one which she/he may assume in the future" (p. 6).

When considering the needs of the trainees as determined by the assessment, the goals and objectives of the training must be chosen to best fit the specific work environment. As I mentioned earlier, most intercultural training involves some emphasis on three areas: cognition, affect and behavior.

Cognitively, ICT [intercultural training] generally is aimed at helping trainees understand how their culture, stereotypes, and attitudes influence their interaction with members of other cultures...Affectively, ICT generally is aimed at helping trainees effectively manage their emotional reactions (e.g. anxiety) when interacting with members of other cultures. Behaviorally, ICT generally is designed to help trainees develop skills they need to interact effectively with members of other cultures. (Gudykunst et al., 1996, p. 65)

By using training methods that target these three areas, combined with the unique needs of the trainees, the specific goals can be mapped and exercises and activities chosen to facilitate some level of change in all three areas.

The final aspect of program development that should be addressed is the training approach. The purpose here is not to examine and compare the different approaches, but to consider the process of determining the content for an intercultural communication training course. Much work has been done to provide overviews and analyses of the varying approaches used and recommended by trainers and educators (McCaffery, 1986; Martin,

1986; Gudykunst, 1991; Ptak et al., 1995; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Landis & Rabi, 1996; Milhouse, 1996).

For the purpose of this thesis, the similar advice of Milhouse (1996) and Gudykunst et al. (1996) will be embraced. Therefore, a multidimensional training approach of varied methods will be recommended in order to ensure that the content of the training reaches all of the trainees and is appropriate for the setting.

The Critical-Events Model

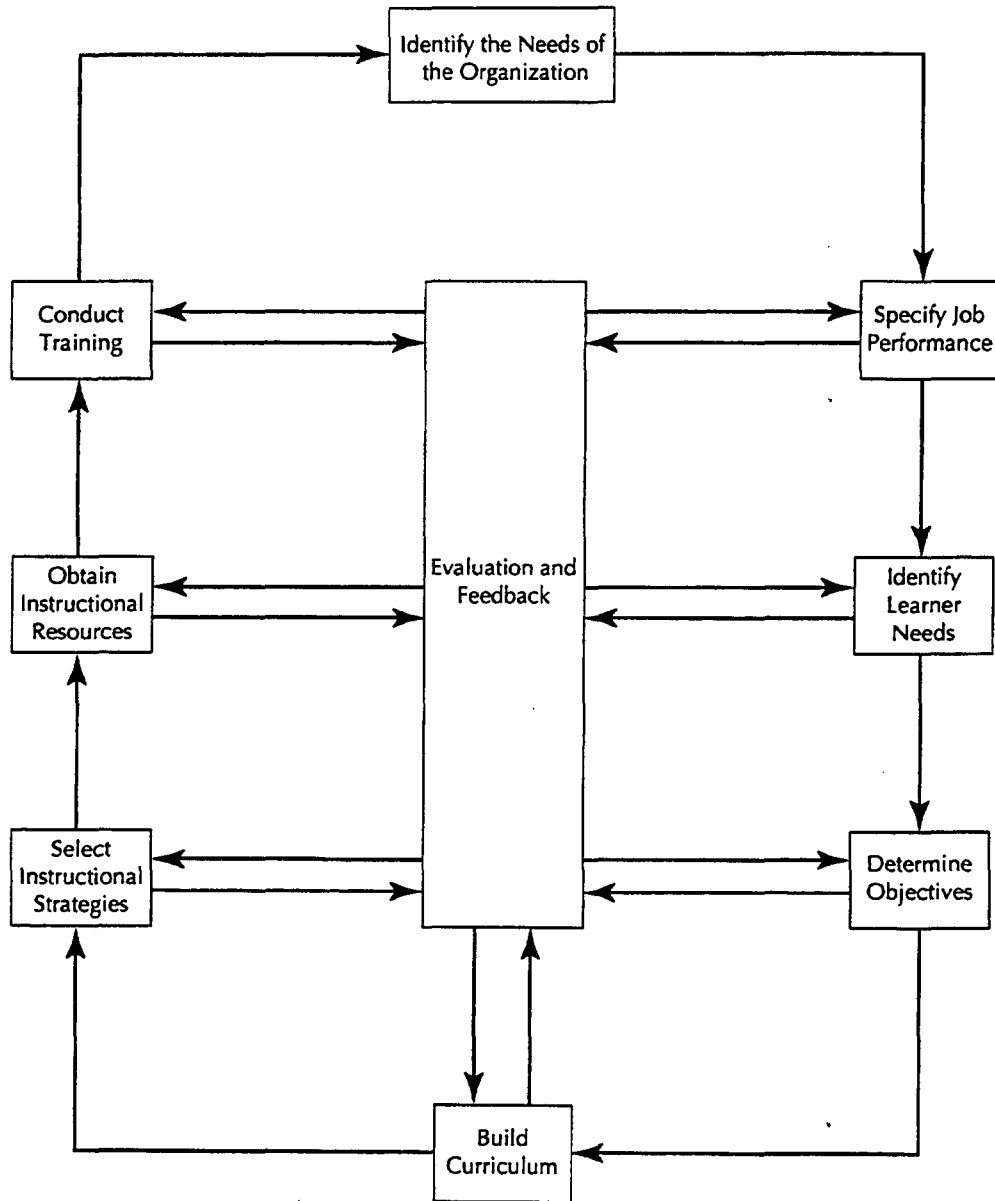


Figure 1. Critical-Events Model

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Overview

As stated earlier, this study seeks to assess the intercultural communication training needs of a dense multicultural work environment, specifically, a small software company comprised of 50% Non-Native English speakers (NNS) representing 13 different countries, and 50% Native English speakers (NS). In order to gather the most complete and accurate data, I used quantitative and qualitative research methods. As Sypher, Applegate & Sypher (1985) report, “a combination of methods is more likely to produce a broader understanding of organizational cultures, as methodological triangulation helps to increase the researcher’s confidence in interpreting his or her results” (p. 23). Although it has been recommended that mixed methods move from qualitative to quantitative (Newby et al., 1998; Sypher, Applegate & Sypher, 1985), that is not to say that the reverse is not also advantageous. Triangulation, or the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators and theories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is most beneficial when used in a way that each “complements the other and counteracts each other’s weaknesses” (Newby et al., 1998:255). I found that initiating the data collection with a quantitative survey and following up with semi-structured interviews based on the survey findings proved to be most beneficial and appropriate for the research site.

“Mixing research methods is particularly important in studying phenomena that have not previously been researched” (Newby et al., 1998:255). Although there is extensive research in the area of intercultural communication, cross-cultural communication, training and adaptation as shown earlier, no research to date has examined the specific intercultural communication training needs of a dense multicultural workplace while considering the

unique characteristics of adult learners. Therefore, my goal was to identify those specific intercultural communication training needs as perceived by the employees.

Participants

The participants of the study were employees of varying job descriptions of a small software engineering company. At the time the initial data were collected via survey instrument, the employees of Softech Ltd. represented thirteen countries as follows: Burma, 1; Vietnam, 5; India, 5; Nepal, 1; Venezuela, 1; Colombia, 1; Hong Kong, 1; Taiwan, 1; China, 6; Estonia; 1; Slovakia; 1; Iran, 1; United States, 30.

The Survey

As mentioned previously, I gathered the initial data via the administration of a twenty-item (including demographic information) survey instrument. I designed and determined the survey questions using Hofstede's (1984) four dimensions of culture as well as specific content areas requested by my supervisor at the research site. The additional areas of focus included: *time use*, *vocabulary*, *hygiene*, *conflict management*, and *overall perceived cultural differences*. Hofstede's dimensions of culture are listed and defined as follows: 1) *power distance*, defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally;" 2) *uncertainty avoidance*, defined as "the extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous situations, and have created beliefs and institutions to try to avoid these;" 3) *individualism vs. collectivism*, which "reflects the position of the culture on a bipolar continuum. Individualism is defined as a situation in which people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family

only, whereas its opposite, collectivism, is defined as a situation in which people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty;” and lastly, 4) *femininity vs. masculinity*. Masculinity is defined as “a situation in which the dominant values in society are success, money, and things, whereas the opposite pole, femininity, is defined as a “situation in which the dominant values in society are caring for others and the quality of life” (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, pp. 419-420). The survey questions correspond to the dimensions of culture and specific content areas as follows: Question (Q.) 1 – Time, Q.2-4a – Language/Vocabulary Skills, Q.5-5a – Uncertainty Avoidance, Q.6 – Individualism v. Collectivism, Q.7 – Individualism v. Collectivism and Masculinity v. Femininity, Q.8-8a – Power Distance, Individualism v. Collectivism and Masculinity v. Femininity, Q.9-10 – Uncertainty Avoidance, Q.11-12 – Conflict, Q.13-13a – Hygiene, Q.14 – Nonverbal Communication, Q.15 – Uncertainty Avoidance, Q.16 – Cultural Difference, Q.17 – Masculinity v. Femininity and Individualism v. Collectivism, Q.18 – Cultural Difference.

I used eleven forced-choice and multiple-choice questions with two requiring additional comments dependent on the response. The other seven questions were open-ended, short answer format. I used a combination of forced-choice and open-ended questions to allow for responses that reflected the most accurate perception of the work environment by the respondents that I may not have accounted for in the forced-choice answers.

Demographic information filtered for native (NS) or non-native English speaker (NNS) and position in the company. I initially considered gender an important category; however, due to the small size of the company, I feared that gender marking would identify individuals and

inhibit participants from completing the survey. See the *Limitations and Recommendations* chapter for additional comments on this.

Prior to surveying my actual participants, I pre-surveyed five of my colleagues who, like my participants, work in a multicultural environment as international student advisors and/or program assistants for Iowa State University's International Education Services office. I did this to ensure that my questions were clear and that I did not use problematic phrases or vague language. I then used their comments, questions, and suggestions to improve the overall survey design. I then sent out the survey to fifty-nine participants via email along with an informed consent form describing the purpose of the study and the methods for ensuring confidentiality. I provided the respondents two self-addressed stamped envelopes to return the questionnaire - one for the survey and one for the consent form, in order that the surveys and signed consent forms could be returned independent of each other and could not be matched together. I ultimately received an equal number of surveys and consent forms. Although I asked respondents to return the survey within a two-week time frame, I did not assign a concrete deadline since my main objective was to collect as many responses as possible. I sent one email reminder to return the survey after three weeks had elapsed. Ultimately, after four weeks, 36 surveys were returned out of a possible 55, making the overall response rate 65% - 10 from NNS (18.2%) and 26 (47.3%) from NS. The difference in response rate between NS and NNS is discussed in the *Limitations and Recommendations* section.

Survey Analysis

I began my analysis of the surveys by assigning each completed survey a number (1-36). I then began the process of entering the data, including the demographic information, from the surveys into a spreadsheet. Because I used a combination of forced-choice, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions, I categorized the short answer questions and assigned them a letter value so that I could tally the responses and view them in a manageable format in the spreadsheet. I then manipulated the cells in the spreadsheet to separate the NS and NNS survey responses and thus categorize and do a content analysis of the responses. If a response to a question was unique or in reference to the answer choice “other,” I recorded it separately for future reference. I also took special note of questions that were left blank (indicated as [No response] in the response tables) or answered with the response “N/A” (not applicable) because this offered insight into the respondents’ views of their work environment as well as general survey respondents’ behavior and overall trends. I then transferred the data from the spreadsheet into tables that I could insert into the original survey document, allowing me to view the responses to each survey question in one document.

The Interviews

I collected the qualitative data over a three-month period using semi-structured interviews of four NS and four NNS of varying job descriptions after the surveys had been analyzed. In order to develop the Interview Guide (see Appendix B), I reviewed the survey results and subsequently had a meeting with my supervisor to discuss what topics I should focus on in the interviews. I determined that *language, communication skills* and *culture*

issues needed further investigation, as well as *teamwork* and *orientation/adaptation to the company*, given what the respondents indicated in the survey. I also wanted to elaborate on *time* issues, since that was a difficult topic to address in the survey, as well as learn more about the use of *email* at the site. In addition, I included a *final comments* question to allow respondents to discuss issues I may not have asked about specifically.

All four NS that I interviewed had also completed the survey; only two out of the four NNS I interviewed had responded to the survey. I gave each participant an Informed Consent Form to read and sign prior to the interview - similar to the form used for the survey. I conducted the thirty to sixty minute interviews either in a private office, or outside the building on the lawn (weather permitting). One interview was conducted in the respondent's home. I gave each interviewee the option of going off-site for the interview, but given their busy schedules, they each preferred to stay on-site. I was initially concerned that respondents would feel self-conscious about being seen with me, knowing they were participating in the interviews, but the respondents did not seem to be uncomfortable or inhibited doing the interviews on-site, and contrary to my concern, very few people saw me at the office with each interviewee. Although this study does not aim to gauge job satisfaction or solicit negative information about the work environment, I wanted to practice discretion as a means of cultural sensitivity for those international employees whose immigration status depends on their employment by Softech Ltd. For this reason, I used note-taking as my recording method as opposed to audio-recording to alleviate the potential fear of participant identification and overall uneasiness. Additionally, because the interviews are supplementary data, I felt that note-taking would suffice. After all the interviews were

complete, I condensed my notes on the computer and reviewed them to identify overlap and themes.

SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables of Responses

Tables 1-18 correspond to each numbered survey question and the responses to that question. Where I asked an open-ended, short answer question independently, or in addition to a forced-choice question, I listed the responses in bulleted format in the appropriate place in the survey. Table 19 shows the breakdown of survey participants and their job titles.

Table 1. Have you ever felt that your colleagues have a different concept of time than you?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Yes	30.8	20.0	27.8
No	53.9	60.0	55.6
Other	11.5	20.0	13.9
[No response]	3.9	0	2.8

For example, at what time does a meeting scheduled for 9a.m actually begin?

- One non-native speaker answered 9:10, seven native speakers' responses ranged from 9:10-9:20. The rest answered 9:00, provided no response, or made an indifferent comment.

Table 2. In general, how would you describe your colleagues' and managers' *technical* vocabulary skills?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Inadequate	3.9	0	2.8
Somewhat inadequate	11.5	10.0	11.1
Adequate	23.1	40.0	27.8
More than adequate	42.3	30.0	38.9
Excellent	19.2	10.0	16.7
Other	0	10.0	2.8

Table 3. In general, how would you describe your colleagues' and managers' *basic* vocabulary skills?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Inadequate	0	0	0
Somewhat inadequate	11.5	10.0	11.1
Adequate	69.2	30.0	58.3
More than adequate	11.5	50.0	22.2
Excellent	7.7	0	55.6
Other	0	10.0	2.8

Table 4. How often do you have trouble understanding what a colleague or manager is saying?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Never	0	0	0
Almost never	11.5	10.0	11.1
Occasionally	80.8	90.0	83.3
Almost always	7.7	0	5.6
Always	0	0	0

Table 4a. If you answered “occasionally,” “almost always,” or “always,” how could this situation be addressed?

Response	Native speakers	Non-native speakers	Combined
Take a class, better English	8	1	9
Slow down	1	2	3
Ask to repeat	5	3	8
Use writing/email	2	1	3
Pay attention better	3	1	4
Use English at home	1	0	1
Both sides need to work at it	1	0	1
[No response]	6	4	10

Note: numbers indicate total number of occurrences of an item.

Table 5. When starting new projects, your responsibilities and duties:

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
a) Are made clear	50.0	50.0	50.0
b) Are not made clear	30.8	30.0	30.6
c) Are too detailed...	0	0	0
d) Other	7.7	10.0	8.3
[No response]	3.8	0	2.8
N/A	7.7	10.0	8.3

5a) How does this affect the efficiency of the individual or team? *Comments from those who answered “Are not made clear” or “other” below:*

Non-native speakers:

- *Work redone*
- *Don't have time to understand, plus lack of resources and equipment make a project hard to start and finish on time, so the project lacks quality*

Native speakers:

- *Goals are not clear*
- *Wasted time, unrealistic deadlines*
- *Low efficiency*
- *Lost time spinning wheels*
- *Takes time for everyone to get up to speed (2)*
- *Low morale, motivations, efficiency*

Table 6. When working in a team on a project, do you prefer that:

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
a) Individuals are recognized	15.4	30.0	19.4
b) Team is focus of recognition	38.5	40.0	38.9
Other (both a & b in all cases)	46.2	20.0	38.9
N/A	0	10.0	2.8

Table 7. Which of the following do you feel has the MOST influence on the success or failure of a project:

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
a) Individual input	11.5	10.0	11.1
b) Luck &/or circumstance	0	0	0
c) Combined talents of team	88.5	60.0	80.6
d) Other	0	20.0	5.6
N/A	0	10.0	2.8

Table 8. Who do you feel is ultimately responsible for the success of a project?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
a) Project Manager	34.6	50.0	38.9
b) Team	57.7	0	41.7
c) Project Manager & Team	3.9	10.0	5.6
d) Engineers	0	10.0	2.8
e) Technical Leader	0	10.0	2.8
Other	0	10.0	5.6
N/A	0	10.0	2.8

8a) Why?

Non-native speakers: words in parentheses indicate how respondent answered #8.

- Design of projects is most important (technical leader)
- A guide for the team (project manager)
- Overtime they put in (engineers)
- Their job/in charge (project manager) 3
- All affected (other)

Native speakers:

- Their job/responsibility/in charge (project manager) 7
- All responsible (team) 13
- Have to give 100% (other)
- Need both (c=both a & b)
- Need to motivate team (project manager)

Table 9. How do you feel about working on a project or task with new colleagues?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Very uncomfortable	0	0	0
A little uncomfortable	26.9	0	19.4
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	7.7	10.0	8.3
Comfortable	42.3	60.0	47.2
Very comfortable	23.1	30.0	25.0

Table 10. If there is a question about a process or procedure, or some project details or requests are not understood, how do you prefer to handle the situation?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Go to source	30.8	40.0	33.3
Find answer/figure it out	11.5	10.0	11.1
Ask co-worker	7.7	0	5.6
Ask manager	11.5	10.0	11.1
Ask anyone	34.6	10.0	38.5
Other	3.8	20.0	8.3
[No response]	0	10.0	2.8

Table 11. Have you ever found it difficult to resolve conflicts or disagreements with your colleagues or managers?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Yes	19.2	30.0	22.2
No	61.5	60.0	61.1
Sometimes	11.5	0	8.3
N/A	7.7	10.0	8.3

11a) If so, why was it difficult?

Non-native speakers:

- *Managers don't always understand details*
- *Managers don't listen to engineers*
- *Managers/technical leaders assume they are smarter – sometimes they won't even listen to you and are too embarrassed to admit you are right*

Native speakers:

- *Favoritism*
- *Communication problems or too busy to talk*
- *Managers focus on minor things*
- *Communication and personality*
- *Abrasive, body language – I feel they don't really have the time for what I think is important*
- *Some think they are always right*
- *Lack of experience on how to manage*
- *Different ways of doing things, language, listening*
- *Some issues make people defensive, but team needs to go with the decision that is made*

Table 12. How do you prefer to resolve conflict in the workplace?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
a) Talk to the individual directly	73.1	90.0	77.8
b) Ask 3 rd person to mediate	7.7	10.0	8.3
c) Ignore situation	0	0	0
Other = a&b, b&c, or a&c	15.4	0	11.1
Other = "depends"	3.9	0	2.8

Table 13. Have you ever felt there was an issue with a colleague's personal hygiene that affected the work environment?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Yes	34.6	20.0	30.6
No	57.7	70.0	61.1
N/A	7.7	0	5.6
[No response]	0	10.0	2.8

13a) If so, how did it affect the work environment?

Non-native speakers:

- *Colleague moved to different office*
- *Bothersome*

Native speakers:

- *Hard to be around that person, avoid them (4)*
- *Disruptive*
- *People moved*
- *Feel sick*
- *Hard to talk to*
- *May have offended someone at a client site, but too embarrassed to tell the individual*

Table 14. Have you ever felt uncomfortable or confused because a colleague or manager did any of the following things?

Response	Native speakers	Non-native speakers	Combined
Stood too close	8	0	8
Stood too distant	1	0	1
Used gestures too much	1	0	1
Was too indirect	4	3	7
Was too direct	2	0	2
Talked too quietly	5	2	7
Talked too loud	3	0	3
Stared at you	2	0	2
Avoided eye contact	4	0	4
Other	4	0	4
N/A	2	1	3
[No response]	7	6	13

Note: numbers represent the number of total occurrences of an item.

Table 15. How do you feel when you have to work with a colleague who is of the opposite gender?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
Very uncomfortable	3.9	0	2.8
A little uncomfortable	0	0	0
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	23.1	10.0	19.4
Comfortable	34.6	50.0	38.9
Very comfortable	38.5	30.0	36.1
[No response]	0	10.0	2.8

Table 16. What situation, if any, has caused you to feel uncomfortable dealing with or talking to a colleague or manager?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
None	46.2	50.0	47.2
N/A	3.9	20.0	8.3
Comments*	30.8	10.0	25.0
[No response]	19.2	20.0	19.4

*Note: see comments below

Non-native speakers:

- *Constructive criticism not well-received, took it personally*

Native speakers:

- *Different backgrounds and attitudes*
- *Having to give opinion or criticize company policy*
- *Compensation*
- *When I can't understand their English*
- *Money (2)*
- *Demanding instant estimate of time*
- *Lack of sales and marketing experience, pressure*

Table 17. Which of the following situations would best serve the work environment:

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
a) If everyone followed same procedures, determined by manager/supervisor	3.9	0	2.8
b) If everyone did things the way they feel is best	3.9	0	2.8
c) If everyone shared ideas and agreed as a group	76.9	90.0	80.6
d) Other	15.4	0	11.1
N/A	0	10.0	2.8

Table 18. In the time you have been with the company, what issues or problems, if any, regarding *cultural* differences have you noticed?

Response	% Native speakers	% Non-native speakers	% Combined
None	42.1	20.0	36.1
Comments*	57.7	40.0	52.8
[No response]	0	30.0	8.3

*Note: see comments below

Non-native speakers:

- *Should talk about different cultures*
- *Management does not listen to engineers*
- *No, because there are too many foreigners*
- *Terms and phrases used that not everyone understands*

Native speakers:

- *Language, slang (2)*
- *Communication, some do not understand English (3)*
- *Have to watch what you say so not to offend anyone*
- *Communication and timelines*
- *Misinterpretation, aggressive v. passive (2)*
- *Cultural differences are an asset*
- *Passive v. dominant, some quiet due to language*
- *US men are direct, others are indirect- I feel at times that those from India are taken advantage of*
- *Hygiene and accents*
- *Written and verbal skills need improvement throughout the company*

Table 19. Survey Participants

Job Title	Native speakers	Non-native speakers	Combined
Engineer	9	8	17
Support Staff	8	0	8
Project Manager	3	0	3
Administration	4	0	4
Other	1	2	3
No Indication	1	0	1
TOTAL RESPONDENTS	26	10	36

Discussion

Certainly, language and communication skills are an important focus of this survey and surprisingly, the results indicate that in general, vocabulary skills are considered to be at least *adequate* by the majority of the respondents. However, it should be noted that technical vocabulary skills rated higher than basic vocabulary skills (questions 2 & 3). Although vocabulary skills rated favorably, when asked if there is trouble understanding what a colleague or manager is saying (question 4), 83% combined responded *occasionally*. Of those who answered question 4a, 40% of NS felt that NNS should take a class to improve their English. It should also be noted that Softech Ltd. had already planned to offer accent reduction courses at the time I administered the survey; therefore, knowledge of that may have influenced respondents and prompted them to suggest accent reduction courses. “Slowing down speech,” “using email,” and “repeating” were other options offered by both groups. Given the prevalence of email usage in general, I chose to devote some focus to that topic in the interviews.

Related to the issue of communication, is that of preparation for the start of new projects, which is a constant reality at this work environment. I included Question 5 in an attempt to gauge the efficiency of communication during the project preparation stage, and was surprised to learn that 30% of NS and NNS combined feel that their responsibilities and duties are *not* made clear when starting new projects. I anticipated that some NNS speakers might find that their duties were made *too* clear, given that all Project Managers who responded to this question are NS, and as their title suggests, are responsible for directing the team of engineers and other technical staff. I made this assumption because American English is generally classified as a low-context language, “where intention and meaning are

emphasized by explicit verbal messages” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 100). To someone from a high-context communication culture, as are many of the NNS, “where intention and meaning are largely expressed through the context of the situation” (ibid.), such emphasis on direct verbal communication and direction might seem excessive. In this study however, that was not the case. Therefore, an examination of the short answer responses provided by those who indicated that their duties are *not* made clear enough has proven particularly significant. NS consistently reported that the efficiency of the team suffers when there is a lack of clarity and direction at the start of new projects. “Low morale and motivation” is another consequence that was given. One NNS speaker reported that “work [is] redone” when duties are not made clear. Another NNS reported that the “project lacks quality.” Although 50% responded that their responsibilities are made clear enough, 30% have indicated that there are considerable project planning issues that need to be addressed.

Because most Softech Ltd. employees work in teams, on or off-site, teamwork communication, collaboration, and recognition are important areas to assess. The survey showed that most employees prefer team recognition over individual recognition, and that the team is ultimately responsible for the success or failure of a project (see questions 7 & 8). However, 15% of NS and 30% of NNS prefer individual recognition, while 11% and 10% of NS and NNS, respectively, see individual input as having the most influence (questions 6 & 7; see also 17). This is one example of an aspect of *individualism versus collectivism* that is relevant to the work culture at Softech Ltd. and any multicultural work environment. Americans’ values vary in this respect as well. An understanding of how to treat this value difference is important for employee performance, satisfaction and retention.

Question 8 highlights another aspect of *individualism versus collectivism* while at the same time touches on the *power distance* and *masculinity versus femininity* dimensions of culture. Ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of a project is an important topic to assess given the inherent teamwork characteristic of Softech Ltd., as well as other Information Technology companies. Notions of leadership and teamwork, and the characteristics that follow, are likely to vary among cultures. For example, individualist cultures, such as the U.S., tend to be small power distance cultures as well, with an emphasis on individual credibility. On the other hand, collectivist cultures tend also to be large power distance cultures, with an emphasis on seniority, rank and title (Hofstede 1991 cited in Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 70). Therefore, as predicted, more NNS than NS reported that the Project Manager is ultimately responsible for the success of a project (50% to 35% respectively), and no NNS respondent chose the Team as ultimately responsible - although one NNS did report that the Project Manager and Team are equally responsible. Not surprisingly, 58% of NS indicated that the Team is ultimately responsible. Clearly, the issues of responsibility and accountability are important in any work environment, and should be given considerable attention in an intercultural business communication training curriculum.

In reviewing question 9, which addresses the dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance, the responses are perhaps related to the issue of accents and communication style as well as uncertainty about new colleagues' cultures and backgrounds. At least 25% of NS feel *a little uncomfortable* when working on a project with a new colleague as opposed to 60% of NNS who reported feeling *very comfortable*. Although the question did not specify whether the hypothetical new colleague was international or not, the interviews with native speakers that followed indicated that they would like to know more about their new international

colleagues' cultures and work ethics when they start working together, and the survey results may reflect this. Question 10 shows that for practical matters, such as dealing with uncertainty about procedures and processes in the workplace, NS and NNS prefer seeking help from someone else. Only 11% combined responded that they would try to “figure it out themselves.”

In matters of conflict, NS and NNS responded similarly (questions 11-12). Interestingly though, the comments provided in response to question 11a provide further insight into the differing perceptions about the nature of conflict. Although only 22% combined reported that they do have trouble resolving conflict, the three NNS (who are all engineers or lower level staff) that offered further comments to the question reported that it was difficult to resolve conflict because *managers* either “don’t understand details,” “don’t listen to engineers,” or “assume they are smarter.” NS, on the other hand, reported many other issues not necessarily focused on managers, such as: “communication problems,” “favoritism,” “language,” “abrasive body language,” and “different ways of doing things.” A similar comment about “listening” was made by one NNS and one NS, and all of these comments suggest that there are likely some *power distance* issues between engineers and managers, as well as general conflict issues which are to be expected in any work environment. Regarding how to resolve conflict (question 12), NS and NNS largely agree that it is best to talk to the individual directly.

Hygiene and nonverbal communication are difficult and somewhat delicate topics to assess. Slightly more NS reported problems with personal hygiene at work than did NNS (35% and 20% respectively) and the comments offered by both groups suggest that it is an issue that needs to be addressed at least from a culture-general perspective. Similarly, more

NS responded to question 14 addressing nonverbal behavior than did NNS (60% of NNS left this question blank). Of those NNS who did answer the question, *indirectness* and *talking too quietly* were the responses given. NS also reported that they were uncomfortable or confused by their colleagues' *indirect* behavior, *talking too quietly*, and *avoiding eye contact*.

Interestingly, only NS indicated that *standing too close* was an issue. As with hygiene, nonverbal communication (in this case) is a topic that should be addressed from a culture-general perspective and can be combined with training in planning and effective teamwork.

Working with colleagues of the opposite gender does not seem to be an issue for NS or NNS, as question 15 shows. My supervisor and myself originally anticipated that it might be an issue for some international employees who come from countries where certain occupations are more gender-specific and men and women do not often work together, but at Softech Ltd., this does not appear to be the case.

I included question 16 as an overlap question to try to ascertain more information about what, if anything, makes people uncomfortable at work. Although previous questions elicited responses to the effect that certain behaviors *do* make people uncomfortable, roughly half of all respondents to this question answered "none." Of the NS who offered comments, the responses ranged from issues of discussing "money," to "different backgrounds" and "lack of sales and marketing experience." Although this question does not provide much more insight into the work environment, the comments do correspond to and confirm responses to previous questions.

I used Question 17 to measure the preferred work environment of NS and NNS, and the results suggest that both groups agree that group consensus best serves the work environment. According to Hofstede's (1997) key differences between masculine and

feminine societies, consensus and equality are the norm in feminine societies. Although the United States ranks 15 out of 50 countries on Hofstede's (1997) Masculinity Index, even NS show preference to behaviors that are associated more strongly with the feminine pole of the continuum. This reinforces the importance of conducting needs assessments (especially in multicultural work environments) before applying theories that may not speak to the reality of the trainees.

Finally, I ended the survey with question 18 to allow for any additional comments the respondents could offer in regard to issues of cultural difference. As the results indicate, communication style and language skills are areas that are often problematic, and the comments provided offer specific topics to be covered in the training. For example, the *passive versus aggressive* dichotomy was introduced by three NS, as well as *direct versus indirect* communication style. Additionally, both groups mentioned "slang", and one NS mentioned "accents" and "hygiene".

Overall, the final question confirms that some of the standard issues affecting multicultural work environments do exist at Softech Ltd. Additionally, through the use of open-ended questions, I was able to learn about some unexpected issues, such as planning and teamwork – content areas which might otherwise be marginalized in intercultural communication research due to the overwhelming potential core cultural issues that are usually the focus of intercultural communication training. Furthermore, given some of the unexpected results, such as the general agreement between NS and NNS about how to handle conflict, working with members of the opposite gender, and what to do when project details are unclear, I was able to avoid focusing on content areas that do not need as much attention.

INTERVIEW RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I divided the interview guide into the following sections: *General*, *Survey Referenced Topics*, *Email Communication*, and *Wrap Up*. The following discussion of the results is similarly divided into sections and includes the specific topics within each section.

General

Orientation/Adaptation

After reviewing the survey data and meeting with my supervisor to discuss the topics I would focus on in the interviews, we decided that asking about how employees are oriented to Softech Ltd. would be a good way to gauge adaptation to the work environment and the transition into a daily routine. Most of the respondents (NS and NNS) reported that there is either *no* formal orientation program or that the minimal existing one needs improvement. One NS and one NNS reported that a formal mentor program should be in place, and other respondents suggested that the depth of the orientation should depend on job title and where the employee is from (e.g. if an international employee has just arrived to the US and needs basic “survival” information). Additionally, NS and NNS largely agreed, when asked if the orientation for Americans and Internationals should be separate, that those Internationals coming straight from their home country should be provided more information to help in the acclimation process; otherwise, one NNS noted, “it should be equal.” However, it was also noted by two NNS that an overall orientation to the company and its origins would be beneficial for everyone, given that the specific work culture and American culture are two separate issues.

Culture

When asked what cultural characteristics of their new colleagues they would like to learn, NNS seemed to be concerned with practical matters such as “special holidays,” the “skills” their new colleague is bringing to Softech Ltd., the “expectation of how many hours” they will be required to work, and knowing that it’s “o.k. to ask for help.” NS were also interested in similar practical matters, but comments such as “appropriate communication,” “talking about directness,” “avoiding offense,” and “respect issues” suggest that NS are more concerned with cultural values and communication etiquette when it comes to learning about new international employees. My assumption is that this is a result of Americans’ general appreciation of politeness. The responses to a question later in the interviews about good communication skills support this.

Orchestrating an event where office staff could learn more about each other is clearly a challenge and calls for a feasibility investigation depending on the work environment. In this case, all NS responded that they would like time set aside for some kind of social gathering – perhaps a lunch social or picnic where everyone brings a national food dish. Two NNS offered the same suggestion. I asked this question to try to gauge the interest level of current employees in getting to know hypothetical new employees, and it appears that most are committed to spending some time and effort on it. Admittedly, time is an important factor to consider.

Survey Referenced Questions

The Survey Referenced Questions section of my interview guide consists of questions on topics that serve as a clarification and elaboration of the survey results, as well as a

member check function. “The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.314).

Language and Communication

The first question I asked in reference to the survey results was about vocabulary skills. Interestingly, three NNS commented on accents. One NNS respondent said: “Communicating is a big problem” and included “tone of voice,” “not asking questions,” and “misunderstanding” as the specific problem areas. Native speakers, on the other hand, focused more on the content of what is communicated, or communication style, such as “direct versus indirect,” “more questioning versus less questioning,” “negotiation,” “idioms and slang,” “negative topics,” and “expectations.” Additionally, one NS pointed out the fact that technical vocabulary is mainly English, so although the vocabulary is good, “conveying ideas is more difficult.”

In terms of communicating information versus negotiating, few elaborated on any difficulty in this area; however, one NNS reported that “there is some discrimination of those who don’t have good English – it’s very difficult to negotiate.” One NS commented, “some [I assume NNS] are more quiet and don’t question authority.” When asked what they consider to be good communication skills, the two groups of respondents provided some interesting comments. Two NS reported behaviors that would be associated with politeness as good communication skills, such as: “smiling,” “eye contact,” “nodding,” and “friendliness.” Two NS also mentioned “listening” and “letting the other person finish”. In

addition to politeness issues, one NS used the terms “integrity,” “direct,” “professional,” “sensitive,” “diplomatic,” “positive,” and “give and take” to describe good communication skills. On the other hand, two NNS indicated that politeness is not that important. For example, one NNS said that “clarity” is a good communication skill while another NNS commented that “email is best...politeness is a habit here [U.S.], it’s fake, so it doesn’t really matter.” Surprisingly, a NNS speaker reported that “management needs good spoken and written [skills], [it’s] not as important for technical people.” As with NS, “listening” was offered by one NNS as a good communication skill, as well as seeking clarification when needed. Clearly, NS and NNS hold some differing opinions of what constitutes good communication skills and the next interview question reiterates some of those differences. In order to approach the topic of communication styles from a different angle, I asked respondents “What different communication styles/traits have you noticed?” Again, NS focused on “politeness,” “confidence,” and the heavy use of email if accents are “thick.” NNS mentioned the need to repeat in order to get the point across, the importance of details and clarity, and that “if you are direct - no problems.”

Teamwork

As I mentioned earlier, teamwork is an important topic to address at Softech Ltd. due to the nature of the company. Generally, project managers lead teams of engineers and other technical staff in projects that could last a few months to a year, or more. Some projects are on-site, but most are off-site at larger companies staffed by other engineers and technical people. Therefore, employees at Softech Ltd. can be expected to work in several different teams throughout the duration of their employment. In regards to sharing ideas with their

team, I asked respondents what influence they, as team members, have within their teams. Not surprisingly, communication style was mentioned as a factor in who gets heard. NS and NNS reported that the more quiet members of the team do not usually talk during meetings; therefore, their ideas aren't heard. Although both groups agree that sharing ideas and agreeing as a team is important, there is an issue of power and status that determines how much influence individuals have; this is probably to be expected in any work environment. Additionally, one NNS said that sometimes his/her "idea is dismissed because he/she is not considered an important person." This obviously goes against the preference that everyone share ideas and be heard, and is an area that should be discussed in a training session.

Time

Because issues of *time* are hard to assess in a survey, I asked two specific questions about it as suggested by my supervisor. The first question asked "How many hours per week do you anticipate you need to work?" My supervisor suggested that this would be a good topic to address because often times NNS especially do not record all the hours that they actually work. NS interviewees largely supported this observation. One NS respondent said, "some [NNS] are taken advantage of" because depending on their culture, the stereotype indicates that they will generally work more hours, and can be expected to work more hours than Americans. In terms of overtime, NS and NNS both mentioned that the number of hours they work depends on the project and the approaching deadline. No one actually complained about working overtime and most reported that they expect to work more at certain times of the year. "Experience [of the team]" and "a good plan" were mentioned as factors that determine how many hours they will have to work. Similarly, in regard to job

title, NS and NNS both said that generally “higher-ups” or “managers” work more hours – again, depending on the project. The second question asked, “Are there times when you are at work but don’t consider yourself to be working?” The responses to this question elicited three distinct issues. Specifically, one NS reported that “many internationals carry over their vacation time because they don’t understand the vacation concept – it’s an issue for us.” Another issue concerns the factor of “how long it [a task] *should have taken*” versus “how long it *actually took*.” One NS and one NNS mentioned this, and the fact that depending on their decision about how long it *should have taken*, they would adjust the recorded hours accordingly. Finally, the third issue relates to the unique tasks of Human Resource administrators and the special needs of Internationals that have just arrived in the U.S. For example, “taking someone to get a driver’s license could be work or not, it depends on how you look at it. The services you provide to employees are important.” This issue does not require special attention in terms of intercultural understanding in the workplace, but it does serve as an important and realistic example of the unique needs of employees in a multicultural work environment, and the various services they require.

Email Communication

As with many work environments today, email communication at Softech Ltd. is used to save time and be more efficient. However, in a multicultural workplace, other factors contribute to the preference to use email. Email generally provides more time to organize thoughts, check grammar and spelling, and edit the overall message. For NNS, this is especially beneficial, as one NNS indicated that “some writing skills are better than speaking.” In reference to the content of emails at work, one NNS (engineer) reported that

email is the “main way to talk about a project.” Interestingly, another NNS (management) reported that “complex issues are not dealt with on email” and that “engineers don’t use it that much.” Clearly, there are different perceptions of how email is used. Unlike most of the NNS interviewees, NS cited more pitfalls of email communication, especially when emailing a culturally different person. For example, “emails get misinterpreted and personality conflicts are harder to resolve,” “people can react to the email and not the message...may realize too late that we didn’t communicate,” “team issues should be face to face,” and “need human side, relationship building.” These issues are probably not unique to Softech Ltd. and the attention to email etiquette is a natural result of the widespread use of email today. Therefore, Softech Ltd. employees could certainly benefit from discussing these difficulties and sharing their expectations about how email should be used.

Wrap Up

To conclude the interviews, I asked the respondents to reflect on what they find most different about cultures they are exposed to at work. The responses from NS included topics that had already been mentioned, such as “language use,” “assertiveness,” and “beliefs.” NNS also mentioned “shyness” and “communication styles.” One NNS made an insightful observation about Americans that is worthy of quoting in full as follows:

“Americans always say they are friendly and good communicators, but if you are difficult to understand, they will avoid talking to you and wasting their time. Asians can tell if an American doesn’t want to talk to them, if they are uncomfortable they just say ‘yeah’ and shake their head – you can tell if the listener just wants to get it over with.”

Certainly, this observation speaks directly to the potential difficulties inherent in intercultural interactions and is a good example of why intercultural business communication training is

so important today. This is not to say that multicultural work environments are necessarily synonymous with misunderstandings and negative feelings. One NNS interviewee commented that the “cultural mix is good,” and at least one NS survey respondent made a similar comment. Additionally, the tone of each interview was generally positive and I was left with the impression that the respondents offered a sincere attempt to provide accurate information about the work environment at Softech Ltd. Table 20 shows the breakdown of the interview participants and their job titles.

Table 20. Interview Participants

Native Speakers	Non-native Speakers
Software Development Technician.	Senior Consultant
Administration Assistant	Software Technician
Human Resources Director	Software Engineer
Human Resources Assistant	Software Engineer

CONCLUSIONS

Summary

As the survey and interview results show, communication style is the most important issue at Softech Ltd. and the primary focus of the training curriculum¹. Specifically, 50% of NS mentioned that indirect or passive communication styles are confusing. Interestingly, 50% of NNS reported the same qualities as confusing or causing discomfort. In addition, politeness was mentioned as an important communication trait by NS, and reported as not important by one NNS. Interviews confirmed that both groups prefer direct communication although indirect communication is clearly a reality at Softech Ltd. One NS expressed concern that certain cultural groups are taken advantage of due to their more indirect and passive communication styles. Issues of shyness, confidence, and level of assertiveness were also mentioned, often resulting in misinterpretations. Clearly, a discussion comparing preferred communication behaviors between NS and NNS would prove beneficial.

Related to direct versus indirect communication style is the notion of *facework*, defined as “the specific communication behaviors that we engage in to ‘save’ our own and/or others’ face” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 38). This notion of *facework* implies the desire to avoid offense and have successful interactions – an issue that the Needs Assessment results show is important to Softech employees. Inherent in *facework* is also the ability to negotiate and resolve conflict effectively, another issue, although not primary, that the training should

¹ Although “difficulty understanding accents” is an important aspect of communication at Softech Ltd., the training will not focus on this issue because Softech Ltd. announced before this project started that they would offer accent reduction courses to those who are interested. Participants were aware of this at the time of the assessment.

address given that at least 20% of Softech employees find it difficult to resolve conflict.

Not surprisingly, the foundation of the training proposal will be communication style. I will use Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions (starting with *individualism v. collectivism*) to introduce the communication topic and will build from there to incorporate short lecture and discussion sessions as well as small group exercises on *face-management, conflict, teamwork, and work values*. The topics of *email communication* and *time use* will be incorporated into the sessions on *communication style* and *work values* respectively.

The Needs Assessment also revealed aspects of the Softech Ltd. work environment that need improvement but are outside the scope of ICT, and should therefore be handled internally. These include *orientation to the company* and *project planning*. Certainly the training that I will provide might contribute to an improvement in these areas, but as an intercultural communication trainer and an outsider to the company, I am not qualified to train in these areas. My training proposal will include a recommendation that Softech Ltd address these areas.

Training Considerations

The results of the Needs Assessment and my own interactions with the trainees led me to the conclusion that some of the trainees will be resistant to the notion of intercultural communication training. My supervisor acknowledged that "part of the battle is convincing everyone it's important." There are several reasons for this. Time and project deadlines are a major issue at Softech Ltd.; therefore taking time away from work for training that is not directly work related is likely to be seen as frivolous. Additionally, because some Softech employees have lived and worked in more than one country, or had other overseas

experiences, I anticipate that they feel that those experiences have provided the necessary practical cultural understanding they need to work effectively in a multicultural environment. Additionally, given the fact that many of the participants have worked together for some time, they may feel that any communication issues have already worked themselves out. Therefore, the training sessions must follow a rigid adherence to the findings of the Needs Assessment, and participants must see the connection between the findings and the training. This also means that some of the original assumptions about what should be trained have to be abandoned or marginalized. For example, *vocabulary skills* were initially thought to be an issue; the survey showed otherwise. Additionally, although conflict certainly exists at Softech Ltd., as in any workplace, the survey indicated that most employees do not have a serious issue with it, and those who do tend to handle it in the same manner. Therefore, *conflict-management* will be approached as a peripheral component of *communication style*.

Considering the characteristics of the trainees and the work environment is a necessary step in the design of any training curriculum. The field of ICT has enjoyed a wealth of input in the form of activities, games, simulations, role-plays, self-assessments, case studies (critical incidents), exercises, and evaluations. It is tempting as a trainer who is eager to share all of these options for increasing intercultural understanding to include one of every activity in the training curriculum. However, only exercises that are appropriate, timely, and relevant will be well received and effective.

Goals and Objectives

The training proposal and subsequent learning goals I have chosen are based on the following two methods for determining learner needs, as described by Dean (1994):

Goals Based on Learners' Observed Needs:

The method most frequently touted as correct in the adult education literature is to develop learning goals based on the learners' observed learning needs – provided that a systematic assessment of learner needs has been conducted.

Goals Based on Learners' Expressed Needs:

In some cases, learning goals are based on what learners say they want or need to learn without any systematic attempt to corroborate by others or by observation. (pp. 70-71)

The combined method of surveying and interviewing served not only to elicit the *observed needs* of the participants but also the *expressed needs*. For example, the survey showed that better planning prior to projects is needed for everyone to understand their duties and responsibilities. In terms of *expressed needs*, the interviews showed that NS and NNS would like to learn more about the cultures and backgrounds of their colleagues in an informal setting where they could socialize. As Dean (1994) explains, “goals are often broad in scope and can be divided into two or more objectives...a goal usually describes, in general terms, what the learner should know, feel, or be able to do after the learning experience” (p. 68). However, the trainer must be able to make rational decisions about what goals to choose and the subsequent curriculum design based on their knowledge of the participants and the training context (Dean, 1994). I discussed some of these factors in the *Training Considerations* section.

Certainly the main goal of the training for Softech Ltd. is to improve intercultural interactions as well as overall understanding. Another related goal I have chosen is the facilitation of discussion of the various cultural dimensions I will present and their impact on multicultural work environments such as Softech's. My feeling about Softech Ltd. is that

discussing the work environment and the various perspectives the employees have as a group will improve understanding and aid in more successful communication overall.

“Learning objectives are derived from the general goal statements which have been developed” and are generally more specific than the goal(s) (Dean, 1994, p. 72). Dean describes three types of objectives: behavioral, content, and problem-centered. Behavioral objectives are “statements [that] describe a certain behavior to be learned; content objectives identify specific material to be learned; and problem-centered objectives describe a problem situation which the learner should be able to address” (p. 74). Problem-centered objectives are most appropriate in “communications, teamwork development, personal development, and resolution of specific problems in an organizational or community context” (p. 74) and are therefore the focus of the curriculum for this study. Content objectives will also be used in order to introduce theory and specific aspects of intercultural communication.

Although the goals and objectives of the training may seem intuitive (or even obvious) to the trainer, it is helpful to keep the distinction in mind in order to design the most effective and focused training plan.

Approach

As Levy (1999) explains, the “path to skill development is through knowledge, experimentation, feedback and analysis. Generally, materials and activities should proceed from the lowest to the highest level of risk” (p. 5). Given that I know there will be some resistance to the idea of intercultural communication training, it is in my best interest to keep the sessions as comfortable as possible for the trainees. Admittedly, role-plays and simulation games are very effective approaches used in ICT, and activities that I would

recommend for a different audience. However, in this case, the varying characteristics of my trainees and the time limitations are such that my recommendation includes shorter, lower risk activities. Therefore, the main learning approach I recommend for Softech Ltd. follows this progression: Introduction/Presentation → Discussion → Self-Assessment → Small Group Exercise. Although I will present some material in a brief lecture format, I have avoided the use of lectures as much as possible and have used discussions as an alternative (see Arnold & McClure, 1996 for more information on the pros and cons of the various approaches).

In addition to discussion sessions, I have recommended small group exercises for the following reasons as offered by Kohls (1999):

- They add variety.
- They heighten the sense of individual involvement.
- They increase the chance of all trainees participating actively in the exercises.
- They are generally at an extremely low risk/threat level, (as compared, for example, to role-play).
- They provide an optimal chance for participants to learn from their peers rather than from the trainer.
- They give a sense of solidarity and support, which is more difficult to achieve in larger, less intimate groups.
- They provide a non-threatening format to try out new ideas (or lifestyles).
- They are often the only practical, experiential exercise available when training time is extremely limited.
- They accomplish the most with the fewest resources.

Although Kohls describes small group activities as “low risk,” I have identified them in my learning approaches as “low/medium” risk because they involve more participation than listening to a presentation or lecture. Furthermore, some participants may not be used to, or comfortable with, working in small groups for training; therefore, the risk is greater.

Training Proposal

Arnold and McClure (1996) recommend that the following items be included in the training proposal, not necessarily in this order, and adapted as necessary for the organization:

- Executive Summary (or synopsis of proposal)
- Target Audience for training
- Title of Program
- Length of Program(s)
- Number of Sessions
- Objective for Each Session
- Content Narrative for Each Session
- Teaching Strategies
- Teaching Material
- Audiovisual Equipment
- Evaluation Plan
- Proposed Follow-up

The length and detail of the training proposal will depend on how much the trainer's supervisor knows about and supports the project. It may also depend on how much information the trainer has provided throughout the assessment process. Because Softech Ltd. asked me to develop an intercultural communication training curriculum, my proposal does not include all of categories recommended above - some of which can be reserved for the more in-depth lesson plan(s).

As Gudykunst et al. (1996) recommend, the training program for Softech Ltd. will begin with an introductory session at which I will explain the purpose of the training as determined from the results of the Needs Assessment survey and interviews. This insures that participants see the need and value of the training. I will also use this session to answer any questions the participants have and explain the main objectives of the training. Following is the actual training proposal for Softech Ltd.

**Softech Ltd. Intercultural Communication
Assessment and Training Project:
TRAINING PROPOSAL
February, 2001**

I. Synopsis:

The results of the Needs Assessment survey and interviews suggest that Softech Ltd. employees would benefit from training in several areas largely related to communication style and work/cultural values. As the results specifically show, communication style is an important issue at Softech Ltd. The expected difference in communication behaviors by employees often results in misunderstandings and inefficiency in teams and at meetings. Additionally, employees hold varying expectations about how communication should take place. These issues can be addressed in a series of short training sessions that would consist mainly of discussion and small group exercises. In addition to training sessions on intercultural communication that I propose to facilitate, this proposal also includes recommendations for potential improvements to the overall work environment and employee efficiency that are outside the scope of intercultural training.

II. Recommendations:

1. Intercultural Communication Training Program: *Avoiding Misunderstandings and Missed Opportunities: Improving Intercultural Interactions at Softech Ltd.*

A. Three ninety-minute sessions:

1. First Session:

- a. Introduction/Presentation of the Needs Assessment results followed by Question and Answer session.
- b. Presentation of the objectives of the training.
- c. Individualism v. Collectivism self-assessment and discussion.

2. Second Session:

- a. Direct v. Indirect Communication Style self-assessment and discussion.
- b. Introduction to theory of *Face* and discussion.

3. Third Session:

- a. Small Group Exercise & Discussion: "Work Values Exercise" (team building).
- b. Working With Groups exercise: "STEAMWORK: An Effective Approach to Team Building" by Mary F. Maples
- c. Handout: "Holding Your Own in Meetings, but Working as a Team" by Dianna Booher in *Training and Development*, August 1994.

2. New Employee Orientation:

The interviews indicate that an improved and more in-depth orientation program for new employees is needed. For some, such a program may be an introduction to the company, the work environment, and basic procedures. For others, the orientation may be an intensive introduction to America and the American work culture. For this reason, new international employees who have just arrived to the United States may require a separate, longer orientation that would include such topics as basic survival skills (e.g. driver's licenses, child care, banking, etc.), business expressions or slang, hygiene considerations, and a general introduction to the Softech Ltd. work culture. Ideally, new American and international employees would take part in the same orientation when possible.

3. Project Planning

An unexpected but important issue that was raised in the survey and the interviews is the need for improved planning at the start of new projects. 30% of all employees who participated in the needs assessment reported that their responsibilities and duties are *not* made clear when starting new projects. The obvious results of this are wasted time, inefficiency, unclear goals, work having to be redone and low morale. Admittedly, 30% of the respondents may not represent the majority of employees; however, due to the fact that effective teamwork and planning are crucial for the successful and timely completion of projects, I recommend that Softech Ltd. review its project planning procedures and take necessary measures to improve them. A short survey of employees may be able to provide suggestions and highlight common shortcomings of the current planning process.

III. Evaluation Plan & Follow Up

I will administer a short evaluation sheet following each training session to assess the immediate outcomes of the training and improve subsequent sessions. I recommend that either myself or the Softech Ltd. staff member in charge of training administer a similar evaluation one month after the completion of the sessions. Ideally, the new employee orientation should be evaluated in a similar manner to gauge if the information provided was helpful and improve subsequent orientation sessions.

Recommended Curriculum

Session 1:

- I. Content:
 - a. Introduction/Presentation of the Needs Assessment results followed by Question and Answer session.
 - b. Presentation of the objectives of the training.
 - c. Individualism v. Collectivism self-assessment and discussion.
Source: Gudykunst (1994). Bridging differences. (p. 52).
- II. Learning Objectives:
 - a. Identify the characteristics of individualist and collectivist values and behaviors
 - b. Assess your own individualist and collectivist tendencies.
- III. Key Points:
 - a. Cultures and individuals can have both individualistic and collectivistic tendencies – they do not necessarily conflict. Supporting Material: Gudykunst (1994).
 - b. Many factors affect the development of individualistic and collectivistic values. Supporting Material: Ting-Toomey (1999). Communicating across cultures. (p. 67).
- IV. Opener: Tell us about your worst training experience.
- V. Session Methods & Visual Aids:
 - a. Power Point presentation
 - b. Question & Answer
 - c. Discussion
 - d. Self-assessment
- VI. Closing
 - a. Thank you for your participation
 - b. Think about your own individualist/collectivist tendencies as we move towards the next session on communication style.
- VII. Evaluation form: See Appendix C.

Session 2:

- I. Content:
 - a. Direct v. Indirect Communication Style self-assessment and discussion.
Source: Gudykunst, William B. (1994). Bridging differences. (p. 145).
 - b. Introduction to theory of *Face* and discussion.
Source: Ting-Toomey, Stella (1999). Communicating across cultures. (Ch. 8).
- II. Learning Objectives:
 - a. Identify and assess your own communication style
 - b. Define the concept of *face*
 - c. Identify ways in which *facework* affects your communication with colleagues and team members.
- III. Key Points:
 - a. Skills needed for constructive conflict-management. Supporting Material: Ting-Toomey (1999). (pp. 219-224).
 - b. Collaborative dialogue and communication adaptability. Supporting Material: Ting-Toomey (1999). (pp. 224-227).
- IV. Opener:

Brief discussion of the following quote: “The greatest need of every human being is the need for appreciation” adapted from William James.
- V. Session Methods & Visual Aids
 - a. Self-assessment
 - b. Discussion
- VI. Closing
 - a. Thank you for your participation.
 - b. Consider your communication style and facework strategies as we move into the next session on work values and teamwork.
- VII. Evaluation form

Session 3:

- I. Content:
 - a. Small Group Exercise & Discussion:
Source: Wolf, Carol (1996). "Work Values Exercise." Experiential activities for intercultural learning. (Vol. 1). (pp. 145-149).
 - b. Working With Groups & Teamwork exercise:
Source: Maples, Mary F. (1992). "STEAMWORK: An Effective Approach to Team Building." The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 17(3), 144-150.
 - c. Handout: Booher, Dianna (1994). "Holding Your Own in Meetings, but Working as a Team." Training and Development, August 1994.
- II. Learning Objectives:
 - a. Identify personal and organizational value systems.
 - b. Strengthen teamwork by showing how each individual contributes to the success for failure of any group venture.
 - c. Identify ways to improve individual effectiveness at meetings.
- III. Key Points:
 - a. Teams should consider and utilize the individual strengths of their team members.
 - b. Social Identity Theory & Intergroup Attribution: These processes frame our expectations and meanings we attach to people's behaviors and actions. Supporting Material: Ting-Toomey (1999) Ch. 6.
- IV. Opener: Cultural proverbs and core values discussion
Source: Tjitendrero, Sandra (1996). "Describing Cultures through Their Proverbs." Experiential activities for intercultural learning. (Vol. 1). (pp. 75-77).
Source: Kohls, Robert L. (1996). "U.S. Proverbs and Core Values." Experiential activities for intercultural learning. (Vol. 1). (pp. 79-81).
- V. Session Methods & Visual Aids
 - a. Small group exercise – flip chart and markers.
 - b. Discussion
 - c. Handout
- VI. Closing:
 - a. Thank you for your participation
- VII. Evaluation form.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Summary

As intercultural trainers are aware, the number of content areas that have been identified and exercises developed to address those areas has reached an astounding level. Although experienced trainers recommend administering needs assessments, an example of the process and the resulting recommendations has so far been unavailable. Therefore, this project provided a necessary exercise in the development of an intercultural business communication curriculum by showing how the use of a needs assessment is critical in determining the content of the curriculum.

Certainly each trainer must decide what type of needs assessment s/he feels is best for the particular organization. As the results of this study show, the combined use of a survey instrument and interviews provided a much more accurate picture of the work environment than one method alone could have revealed. Additionally, trainers should be prepared to use quantitative and/or qualitative data collection methods, depending on the size, preference, and nature of the organization. For example, some managers may be numbers driven; others may be more interested in what their employees have to say. Larger companies may necessitate the use of a quantitative survey; smaller companies might allow the trainer to speak with every trainee individually. For these reasons, the successful trainer should be flexible and prepared to do various types of needs assessments.

Not only does the needs assessment help determine the content of the training, it also reveals the attitudes of the trainees toward the topic and toward training in general. For example, in this study, the use of open-ended, short answer format for some of the survey questions allowed respondents to say as much, or as little, as they wanted. This offered

insight into the trainees' level of interest in talking about intercultural issues. Similarly, survey participants' *non-response* to some questions also suggested that certain topics were either irrelevant to that individual or not worth responding to for some other reason. In the case of the qualitative portion of the needs assessment, most interviews lasted at least forty-five minutes. Two of the shortest interviews (thirty minutes), however, were with NNS. The responses given in those interviews were generally more brief than the others, suggesting that their interest level, or perhaps comfort level, in talking about intercultural issues was lower. Additionally, one NNS interviewee mentioned that any event that might be organized to facilitate cultural awareness at Softech Ltd. should not be mandatory, but a choice of the employee. Other interviewees were more enthusiastic about such events and felt everyone should attend.

Without a doubt, the trainer must be prepared for such differences in assessment participation, differences of opinion, and ultimately, differences in the level of participation in the training. Although the needs assessment may result in surprising or contradictory results in some cases, it certainly helps gauge the trainees' attitudes and thus prepares the trainer for any resistance s/he might face from the trainees. The needs assessment also highlights specific areas that trainees are interested in improving and provides a sense of how much thought the trainees have already put into the topic. For example, many respondents reported that indirect versus direct communication style is an issue at Softech Ltd. At least two respondents elaborated on that issue by mentioning that some NNS are taken advantage of or not heard in meetings due to their indirect communication style. This suggests that the latter respondents are not only interested in improving intercultural communication at work, but are also aware of the potential detrimental results of this cultural difference.

Another potential outcome of the needs assessment is the recommendation *not* to train the trainees, or in the case of this study, a recommendation for training that is outside the expertise of the trainer. If a needs assessment results in a recommendation that could benefit the organization beyond the training the trainer has been contracted to do, value has been added to the process and the trainer can feel confident that his/her needs assessment was thorough.

Finally, “It is important to recognize that ICT alone is not enough to improve intercultural relations; the organizational culture must also reinforce the training” (Gudykunst et al, 1996, p. 64). Conducting a thorough needs assessment and presenting a solid training proposal based on the results will help to insure that the organization realizes the need for the training and will subsequently support the trainer’s efforts.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

The results of this study show that the process of developing an appropriate intercultural business communication training curriculum is quite involved and should not be simplified to the random selection of theory-laced lectures and activities. Given the inherent diversity in multicultural work environments today, intercultural trainers should carefully assess the available data collection strategies and the characteristics of their trainees to insure that they use the most appropriate method for the work environment. Depending on the organization and the purpose of the training, a survey or interview administered independently may suffice in gathering the data necessary to design an appropriate curriculum. Focus groups, participant observation, and informal conversations are other data collecting strategies that might also prove more effective.

In the case of this study, I might have collected more relevant data had I been able to spend more time at the site as an observer, or had greater access to the participants. Additionally, due to the size and cultural diversity of Softech Ltd., I was limited in the demographic information I could ask for due to the fear of isolating specific individuals to whom I promised anonymity. A study such as this with additional isolated factors such as nationality, gender, length of time living in the U.S., and number of years speaking English could offer further insight into intercultural communication issues in culturally diverse work environments.

Given the restrictions of using only one data collection method and my own desire to gather as much data as possible, I felt it was necessary to use both quantitative and qualitative methods. Although I believe this was the most appropriate way to obtain the information I needed to design the curriculum, this is not to say that it was the easiest. The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the potential participants greatly impact the quality and quantity of the data the trainer will be able to obtain. For example, many of the NNS participants of this study depend on their immigration status via their employment by Softech Ltd., thus adding a unique dimension to their motivation to participate. This is one possible explanation for the low number of responses from NNS (approx. 33%, as opposed to 86% from NS).

Another aspect of this process that needs to be investigated is the degree to which cultures other than “American” value the use of surveys and interviews as needs assessment tools, and whether they question the process of training to improve communication at work in the first place. For example, Buckley (1998) highlights the methodological and cultural difficulties of applying Western-style survey research to the social realities of the Russian

Federation due to cross-cultural issues and ideological differences. Intercultural communication trainers would benefit from a similar investigation, applied to the social realities of multicultural environments. Furthermore, related to the question of methodology is the question of how cultures other than American handle intercultural communication issues and to what extent they are committed to improving intercultural interactions. As the reality of living and working in a multicultural environment increases, future studies in the process of designing appropriate training curriculums can only benefit trainers and thus improve the quality of their programs.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Cultural Diversity in the Workplace: Needs Assessment Survey

- 1) Have you ever felt that your colleagues have a different concept of time than you?

For example, at what time does a meeting scheduled for 9a.m actually begin?

- 2) In general, how would you describe your colleagues' and managers' *technical* vocabulary skills? *(please circle one)*

- 1 - inadequate
- 2 - somewhat inadequate
- 3 - adequate
- 4 - more than adequate
- 5 - excellent

- 3) In general, how would you describe your colleagues' and managers' *basic* vocabulary skills? *(please circle one)*

- 1 - inadequate
- 2 - somewhat inadequate
- 3 - adequate
- 4 - more than adequate
- 5 - excellent

- 4) How often do you have trouble understanding what a colleague or manager is saying? *(please circle one)*

- 1 - never
- 2 - almost never
- 3 - occasionally
- 4 - almost always
- 5 - always

4a) If you selected 3, 4 or 5, how could this situation be addressed?

5) When starting new projects, your responsibilities and duties: *(please circle one)*

- a) Are made sufficiently clear
- b) Are *not* made sufficiently clear
- c) Are too detailed and take up too much time
- d) Other (please explain) _____

5a) How does this affect the efficiency of the individual or team?

6) When working in a team on a project, do you prefer that: *(please circle one)*

- a). Individuals' contributions to the project are recognized?
- b). The team is the focus of recognition?
- c). Other (please explain) _____

7) Which of the following do you feel has the MOST influence on the success or failure of a project: *(please circle one)*

- a). Individuals' suggestions and input
- b). Luck and/or circumstances
- c). The combined talents of the team members
- d). Other (please explain) _____

8) Who do you feel is ultimately responsible for the success of a project?

8a) Why?

9) How do you feel about working on a project or task with new colleagues?
(please circle one)

- 1 - very uncomfortable
- 2 - a little uncomfortable
- 3 - neither uncomfortable nor comfortable
- 4 - comfortable
- 5 - very comfortable

10) If there is a question about a process or procedure, or some project details or requests are not understood, how do you prefer to handle the situation?

11) Have you ever found it difficult to resolve conflicts or disagreements with your colleagues or managers?

11a) If so, why was it difficult?

12) How do you prefer to resolve conflict in the workplace?

- a) Talk to the individual(s) involved directly
- b) Ask a third person to mediate and /or help
- c) Ignore the situation/problem because it will eventually go away
- d) Other (please explain) _____

13) Have you ever felt there was an issue with a colleague's personal hygiene that affected the work environment?

13a) If so, how did it affect the work environment?

14) Have you ever felt uncomfortable or confused because a colleague or manager did any of the following things? *(please check all that apply)*

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| _____ stood too close to you? | _____ talked too quietly? |
| _____ stood too distant? | _____ talked too loud? |
| _____ used gestures too much? | _____ stared at you? |
| _____ was too indirect (or seemed passive)? | _____ avoided eye contact? |
| _____ was too direct (or seemed aggressive)? | |
| _____ other behaviors (please explain) _____ | |

15) How do you feel when you have to work with a colleague who is of the opposite gender?

- 1 - very uncomfortable
- 2 - a little uncomfortable
- 3 - neither uncomfortable nor comfortable
- 4 - comfortable
- 5 - very comfortable

16) What situation, if any, has caused you to feel uncomfortable dealing with or talking to a colleague or manager?

17) Which of the following situations would best serve the work environment: *(please circle one)*

- a). If everyone followed the same procedures, determined by the supervisor(s)/manager(s)
- b). If everyone did things the way they feel is best
- c). If everyone shared their ideas and agreed as a group on the best procedures
- d). Other (please explain) _____

18) In the time you have been with the company, what issues or problems, if any, regarding **cultural** differences have you noticed?

Position - Please check one of the following:

____ Engineer ____ Support Staff ____ Project Manager ____ Administration
 ____ Other

Is English your first language? _____

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. General

1. Orientation/Adaptation:
 - a. What are your impressions of the orientation process/procedure for new employees?
 - b. What type of orientation should be offered to new international employees as opposed to new American employees? Or is that necessary?
2. Culture:
 - a. What kind of information about your new colleagues would you like to learn, i.e. culture, values, language, etc.?
 - b. If there were opportunities to learn about your colleagues' cultures, what sort of forum or medium would you prefer?

II. Survey Referenced Topics

1. Language & Communication:
 - a. Overall, the survey I administered showed that most employees think the vocabulary skills of their colleagues is adequate or more than adequate. What further comments can you make on this area?
 1. Communication of terms vs. communication of ideas?
 2. Project information vs. negotiation
 - b. What do you consider to be good communication skills or traits?
 1. Verbal & nonverbal
 - c. What different communication traits/styles have you noticed?
2. Teamwork:

- a. The survey showed that most people agree that everyone should share their ideas and agree as a group as to the best way to do things. What influences do you as a team member have?
 - b. Would it be appropriate to change a process without notifying a manager?
3. Time:
- a. How many hours a week do you anticipate you need to work? What circumstances might cause this to fluctuate?
 - 1. Job title?
 - b. Are there times when you are at work but you don't consider yourself to be working? What are these times?

III. Email Communication

- 1. How would you describe the communication you do with colleagues via email?

IV. Wrap Up

- 1. What do you find most different about other cultures you are exposed to at work?
- 2. Final comments or thoughts

APPENDIX C: EVALUATION FORM

Softech Ltd. Intercultural Communication Assessment and Training Project

Program Evaluation

Session: 1 2 3 (please circle one)

Date: _____

Please indicate your degree of confidence in the following areas:

Prior to the session:	Very Confident			Confident			Not Confident	
1. I understood the characteristics of individualism and collectivism	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
2. I understood my own individualistic/collectivistic tendencies	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	

After the session:

1. I understand the characteristics of individualism and collectivism	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
2. I understand my own individualistic/collectivistic tendencies	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

	Satisfactory				Unsatisfactory		
Overall, I would rate this session:	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
I would rate the facilitator:	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
I would rate the content:	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

This session was valuable because:

This session could be improved by:

This material is confidential and is only used by the trainer to improve the quality of the training program.

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